

Testimony for Katherine Wood
Joint Public Hearing of
Program Review and Investigations Committee
And Education Committee

February 27, 2008

Good afternoon Senator Gaffey, Senator Meyers, Representative Fleischmann and Representative Wasserman, and members of the Education and Program Review and Investigation Committee. I am here to support SB 329 and 330.

My name is Katherine Wood, and I'm a teacher in Hartford. I am here today to comment on SB 329 and 330 and the rewards and agonies of serving as a BEST mentor for the past three years. During that short time I have guided approximately twenty-two teachers across two years and the completion of their portfolios. You heard me correctly when I said twenty-two teachers. During that time I also worked full time as a classroom teacher. Hartford does provide compensation for this effort; I think it probably comes out to less the 25 cents and hour.

I have been honored to work with teachers as they prepared their portfolios. I have taped lessons, guided the construction of the task and served as editor. Guidance has been provided in the technical challenges from uncooperative video equipment to computer skills. In that time I have also provided vast quantities of encouragement as teachers at the very start of their careers are challenged to complete an inappropriate task.

I say the task is inappropriate for several reasons:

(1) The preparation of a teaching portfolio which asks for extensive reflection on educational practices is Herculean when you are just coming into a full understanding of your talents and challenges as a teacher.

(2) Preparation of this nature should be fully supported by a strong mentor mentee relationship. There is no way I have been able to fully provide this to my charges. I have two habits that prevent me from being completely effective; I like to eat and sleep everyday! Several of them spent a long portion of the Martin Luther King weekend at my house reviewing videos and discussing feedback on lessons. I am sure this is not the last time I will surrender weekends and evenings to support new teachers. I have read lesson on my laptop while flying, spent countless late hours on the phone working with exhausted young people.

(3) On several occasions I have worked with teachers who were placed in new grade levels their second year of teaching. These teachers had the full challenge of being new to a curriculum and doing BEST. There was no opportunity for them to reflect on past practice and improve lesson delivery the second year. These grade level changes have frequently involved a difference of at least three levels. We all know that an eight year olds classroom demeanor and needs are very different from those of an eleven or twelve year old.

I would like to urge the committee to find the means to provide for the provision of effective mentoring relationships for all teachers in the BEST program. Mentors should be from the same discipline and closely related grade levels. Mentors need time to be in classrooms observing and coaching new teachers. The National Association of Secondary School Principals, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, and the National Staff Development Council have all recognized the critical role mentors play in developing and retaining new teachers. If the State of Connecticut is serious about improving education we must retain teachers. We have a powerful tool available; are we going to take it out of the toolbox and use it effectively?